

## HOPE FROM FRANCE

By

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It needs a long view to assess the uses of adversity. At the time, while the intolerable thing is happening, hope itself seems hopeless. But at the heart of the disaster some new life starts springing: a new life, that is yet the recovery of something old and forgotten. For the Christian, that is only to say that no circumstance is without its providential value. *Tout ce qui arrive est adorable.*

In France in 1941 there seemed little room for hope. The ignominy of defeat reached deeper far than the level of a military surrender and it is easy enough to understand the mood of tortured immolation—"All that is left to France is to suffer"—which came over many Frenchmen at that time. But it is not given to the members of Christ to despair, and the failure of human hopes reveals all the more surely the new life we are called to share: "you will be distressed, but your distress shall be turned into joy" (John xvii: 20).

It was precisely at this time, 1941, that there came into being a movement, later to be known as the *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique*, which had for its aim nothing less than the recovery of the parish church as the Christian *home*, the place where the children of God meet and worship and whose influence extends to all they do. It might seem that there was no need to found a society to affirm what is an integral part of the Church's function as the Mystical Body of Christ. But the Dominican founders of the C.P.L. had precise objectives in view. The German occupation brought grave difficulties for Catholic life in France. It was no longer possible to publish any periodical of independent judgment: many organisations were paralysed—their leaders dispersed, in German prison-camps or beginning, in secret, the work of resistance. And over all was the mood of despondency; homes broken up, the presence of the invader, France in shadow.

For the Church the situation was by no means hopeless. Deprived of many of the extrinsic organs of her work, it meant that now there must be a recovery of her inner life, that essential life of the local parish, the local unit that had too often been forgotten in the exhilarating air of congresses, movements, manifestoes. The need was above all to get back the springs of the Christian life as corporate, of worship as a common offering of the Christian family, of the whole of life as permeated by the hidden vitality of the incarnation. So it was that the well-known publishing house, Editions du Cerf, began publishing a series of cheap albums, *Fêtes et Saisons*, employing a brilliant technique of montage and editing, which gave to each number the up-to-

the-minute shining liveliness of an American weekly—but without its advertisements or its vulgarity! In a statement it was explained: “We want to convince you that the grace of Christ is a stranger to nothing. It has sympathetic affinities with all human realities and can transfigure them every one. The Christian life is not confined to a weekly half-hour at Mass, it is a daily life. . . . We must restore the Catholic imagination.”

The series was an overwhelming success. One set dealt with the liturgical year, another with such subjects as the right use of Sunday, the missionary work of the Church, the vocation of youth. But the albums did not provide mere vague uplift: they were extremely actual, and in their superb photography and relevant articles, the concern was with the restoration of Catholic life in the existing situation; parishes often without priests, millions away from home, the vast army of prisoners of war—but in every circumstance one constant thing remained, the Church and her healing mission. The new life begins at home.

The constant preoccupation of Protestants with “the failure of the Churches” need not make Catholics complacent. Certainly the Church cannot “fail”; the gates of Hell, we are promised, shall not prevail against her. Nevertheless it would be useless to deny that the life of the Church has been tragically impoverished by the decline of the corporate, commonly shared-and-uttered, worship that is the first duty of the members of Christ, to love God and to worship Him as the source and centre of the new life of grace. The recovery of the liturgical life of the Church as a normal and necessary thing for the full spiritual life of her children is then primarily a *pastoral* concern. For the Liturgy is not an antiquarian affair, a matter of the proper interpretation of plainchant or the pattern of vestments: it is the official prayer of the Church, *la piété de l'Eglise*, in the classical phrase of Dom Beauduin.

Just as the local *ecclesia*, the gathering-place, is a home of the faithful, so is the Liturgy its language, its play even. The restoration of Catholic life, then, begins in the parish church which is its home, and it *demand*s participation in the Liturgy, which is its official worship.

The success of the *Fêtes et Saisons* series (and the circulation of each number, even in occupied France, was reckoned by the hundred thousand) showed that there was ample room for a new approach to the liturgical life as a *pastoral necessity* and not as an aesthetic extra. The *Centre de Pastorale Liturgique* came into existence in the autumn of 1943, and in less than three years its achievements have been remarkable. At the first congress of C.P.L. held at Vanves in January, 1944, Père Duployé, O.P., one of the founders of the movement, explained its aims. “The purpose which brings us together is the restoration of

the liturgical life of our French parishes." He pointed out that it was no longer a matter of familiarising people with the idea of liturgical participation (though in fact the "liturgical movement" had made much less progress in France than in Germany and Belgium). Indeed, extravagant claims are too often made for it, and all sorts of innovations and excessive intransigence in liturgical propaganda have too often discredited efforts, good in their intentions but regrettable in their methods. "Our movement should be wise enough to affirm above all its faith in the traditional Catholic liturgy, revealed in its inexhaustible wealth . . . rather than to promote rashly an adaptation of the liturgy for the people: it should seek to draw the people into the liturgical *mysterium*." There is room in such a movement for many elements: liturgical history, ecclesiastical music, experiments at greater participation, but always the determinant is the pastoral concern of the Church: to bring men to worship and love God. That is the Liturgy in its essential role, *rationabile obsequium*. Such too was the emphasis of Mgr. Terrier, Bishop of Tarantaise (subsequently of Bayonne), one of the most enthusiastic supporters of C.P.L. Three of his pastoral letters, published under the title *Pour un Renouveau Paroissial* (2) reflect the larger background of C.P.L.: the meaning of Sunday, the day of the Lord; the parish, that essential cell of Catholic life—its history, the need for its vivification and a magnificent plea for the *man* in the Catholic life of the parish. "The Church has need of *men's* faith, their prayers, their charity, their penance, their apostolate. She can never consent to be deprived of these things."

The report of the Vanves Congress might serve as a blue-book to the liturgical movement everywhere. There were papers on the aims and methods of the new movement—notably by Père Morin of the Oratory and by Père Doncoeur, S.J. (3). Speaking of the use of the word "pastoral" in connection with the Liturgy, Père Morin explained: "The adjective is not a corrective but an affirmation. It shows that among all the different ways of approaching the Liturgy this one has been chosen, namely, that which gives back to the faithful the prayer of the Church (*la piété de l'Eglise*), so that its prayer may become the prayer of the parishes, too, which are its essential cells. We do not envisage an élite, but all the faithful, all the baptised."

Another section dealt with liturgical history, and included an excellent discussion of private devotion in the Middle Ages and of the place of Sunday in Christian antiquity (one of the best of the *Fêtes et Saisons* albums is the one on the use of Sunday).

But the main concern was with the application of the ideals of C.P.L. to the existing situation in France. Papers dealt with such subjects as "Modern Secular Liturgies," "The

Liturgical Life in a working-class District," a constructive contribution from two young laymen—"What we expect of our Parishes"—and "The Family Ideal and the Liturgy." Finally came "The Witness of Experience," containing notable accounts of what had been accomplished already to bring back the Liturgy to its rightful place as the *normal* worship of the parish church.

Mgr. Chevrot gave a fascinating account of how the parochial High Mass (with all participating actively) was restored in a Paris suburban church, and other speakers told of their experience among Jocistes, Scouts, etc. Most moving of all, and certainly most significant, was the account given by two ex-prisoner priests, Dom Marié and Père Dubarle, O.P., of their experiences of the Liturgy in what might seem unpromising circumstances. The irony is that it needed a prison camp to show what the liturgical life could mean. And the important thing that ensued was that the Liturgy is a *means of instruction*: the best of all, indeed, sanctified and enlivened as it is by the life of the whole praying Church, whose voice it is. It is, as it were, the incarnation of doctrine.

As Dom Marié remarks, "the liturgy is a *locus theologicus*, and it contains in its texts and rites the mark of the dogmatic development of the centuries. It is possible to extract that truth, and to do so is to find an immediate echo in the Christian instinct of the faithful."

The methods of the C.P.L. are twofold: instruction and action. Already numerous publications have appeared. The *Etudes de Pastorale Liturgique* is the first volume of a series *Lex Orandi*, which also includes a history of the Liturgical Movement by Dom Olivier Rousseau (4). This is a most valuable account of the work of the continental movement of the last century (the study ends with Pius X) and gives a clear and objective account of the work of Dom Guéranger and the Solesmes Benedictines as well as of the German school that followed the original impulse of Moehler's theology of the Church. Dom Rousseau lays great stress on the unswerving orthodoxy and submission to authority of Dom Guéranger and the other pioneers; "Dom Guéranger, in whom love of the Liturgy went side by side with a remarkable Catholic instinct, so welded these two strands that in the movement that derived from him they became inseparable."

A more popular series, *La Clarté-Dieu*, aims at "promoting the understanding of liturgical forms and institutions" and at "giving an exact interpretation of the ideas and texts in which the prayer of the Church is expressed."

Other series of publications include *Les Monastères de France*, *En Prière avec l'Eglise*, *Bible et Missel* (handbooks on the

Liturgical texts). The review of the movement, *La Maison-Dieu* (5) is a substantial quarterly which English editors will envy for its size (nearly 200 pages each issue) and quality.

Also sponsored by C.P.L. is the series of *Cahiers de l'Art Sacré* which has included beautifully illustrated volumes on the reconstruction of churches, French Romanesque painting and modern Religious Art (6). Of particular value is a volume *Le Prêtre Gardien d'un Patrimoine Sacré* (7) which might be described as a cautionary tale on the proper care of churches.

It will be seen how extensive is the range of the C.P.L. But it is not concerned merely to instruct and advise, though of course its publications are of the utmost value, and (essential point) of the highest technical distinction. Already regional congresses have been held, and last year the first national congress met at St. Cloud. These gatherings are practical in their aim. They are not a meeting of the élite: rather do they aim at extending the work of the Pastoral Liturgy apostolate through the traditional unit of the parish. It should be the proud boast of the Catholic that his religion is "parochial." At a time of upheaval and social disintegration, this French movement seeks to give back to the parish and to all its dwellers the heritage that is theirs.

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Books referred to:—

- (1) *Etudes de Pastorale Liturgique*,  
(Lex Orandi Series)—120 francs.
- (2) *Pour un Renouveau Paroissial*, by Mgr. Terrier, 30 francs.
- (3) Also published separately in *La Clarté-Dieu* series—  
*Pour un Mouvement Liturgique Pastoral*, by Gaston Morin, 6 francs.  
*Conditions d'une Renaissance liturgique*, by Paul Doncoeur, S.J.,
- (4) *Histoire du Mouvement Liturgique*, by Dom O. Rousseau, 110 francs.
- (5) *La Maison-Dieu*; annual subscription 250 francs (abroad).
- (6) *Cahiers de l'Art Sacré*:  
1. *Reconstruire les Eglises*, 40 francs.  
2. *Peintures Romanes Françaises*, 40 francs.  
3. *Œuvres Nouvelles et Artistes Nouveaux*, 55 francs.
- (7) *Le Prêtre*, etc., 25 francs.

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All the above to be obtained from Le Centre de Pastorale Liturgique, Les Editions du Cerf, 29 Boulevard de la Tour-Maubourg, Paris—7e.